

## St. Vincent de Paul Program Coordinator Served His Time, Now Serves Other 'Returning Citizens'

CINCINNATI – The first time Dominic Duren ever visited the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Cincinnati's West End, it was to wait in line for a free winter coat.

Duren had been released from prison a few months earlier but couldn't find work. He had a high school diploma. He had learned data entry and earned an associate's degree while serving 12 years for crimes he committed during a drug deal gone bad.

But every time he checked the box on a job application to acknowledge he had a prior felony conviction, his chances for a decent life seemed to evaporate.

"There is nothing like that feeling when you're looking in the mirror and no one expects you to be anywhere. No one trusts you to do anything," he said. "They don't trust me to flip a burger, take out the trash, clean their buildings. It makes you feel unworthy."

Now Duren works at St. Vincent de Paul as the coordinator of a re-entry program designed to help men and women like him, people he calls returning citizens.

The program is part of a five-year collaborative effort to help those men and women build better lives for themselves and their families and reduce poverty. It's funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, an anti-poverty program of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Cincinnati is one of five participating cities. The others are Boston, Milwaukee, New Orleans and Orlando.

In his job, Duren works with local partners including the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, The AMOS Project, the HELP Program at St. Francis de Sales Church, the Ohio Justice & Policy Center, Nehemiah Manufacturing and the Hamilton County Office of Reentry.

He refers returning citizens to programs and resources that can help them get their lives back on track. He links them with money from St. Vincent de Paul to help cover rent or utilities. He helps connect volunteer mentors with returning citizens who need someone they can trust and depend upon. And he talks with local community groups and business owners during what he calls the Dismas Journey. It's a 90-minute interactive presentation about incarceration, the problems that returning citizens face and the ways that businesses can grow by giving those men and women a chance. The Dismas Journey is named after Saint Dismas, the "penitent thief" who was crucified next to Jesus.



Dominic Duren, Society of St. Vincent de Paul Cincinnati coordinator of the re-entry program.  
Photo credit: Lucy May

Insiders can read more about Duren's personal story and the people and programs that helped him get his life on track.

For more information about the St. Vincent de Paul Re-entry Program, the Dismas Journey or becoming a volunteer, go to [www.svdpcincinnati.org](http://www.svdpcincinnati.org) or call Duren at (513) 562-8851.